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Date: Tue, Aug 4, 2020 at 11:54 AM
Subject: Comments on electronic participation
To: <foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov>

Members of the FOIA Council:

My name is Ann Harbour, I am a resident of the City of Alexandria and serve on the Commission for Women and have previously served as the Chair of the Public Health Advisory Commission.

I write in support of HB 321 and ask that the FOIA Council establish an Electronic Subcommittee. COVID-19 has placed a greater reliance on flexibility in public meetings to ensure transparency and public engagement. I ask that Council consider increased flexibility for electronic meetings and participation, using the language of HB 321 as a baseline to develop standards and move towards electronic participation in up to 25% of meetings held per calendar year.

A consistent barrier to ensuring equitable representation on boards and commissions is in person meeting requirements. When we evaluate those who are able to participate, it is clear that those who have flexibility in their personal and professional life gravitate toward public bodies with fewer barriers such as transportation, work hours/schedules or family responsibility. When government accounts for these barriers to participation by expanding technological platforms, we invite engagement that reflects the diversity of experiences of Virginians that can serve as the basis for forming public policy that accounts for the needs of a broader citizenry.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective and wish you well during your deliberations.

Best regards,
Ann Harbour